

## **USDA Observes the 2006 National Disability Employment Awareness Month**

On October 4, 2006 the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights sponsored a ceremony in observance of the 2006 National Disability Employment Awareness Month. The following is the text from the speech given by Assistant Secretary Margo M. McKay at opening of the ceremony.

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month. This time is set aside each year to honor Americans with disabilities and their contributions to society. It is also the time to emphasize full inclusion of persons with disabilities into our workforce. Enactment of laws through the years has brought awareness and a legal obligation. However, in the spirit of these laws, each of us must do our part everyday to embrace inclusion and provide opportunities and accommodations as necessary for employees with disabilities. Through these individual efforts, we will achieve greater integration of people with disabilities in USDA, the federal workforce, and throughout our society.

USDA's goal is to become the employer of choice. People with severe disabilities make up 1.5 percent of USDA's workforce. This exceeds the Federal-wide rate of 1.3 percent. USDA continues to be recognized by the Department of Labor as a lead Federal employer of students from the Workforce Recruitment Program for college students with disabilities. USDA hired 37 students this past summer. Not only were students placed in summer internships, but many were hired through student educational employment appointments that provide work experience while the students are working toward their college degrees. Investing early in these students leads to a win-win for all: a permanent job for the student upon graduation and a well-trained employee for the USDA agency. They will bring the knowledge and skill sets we need at USDA, and I highly commend those agencies that have invested in the future of these students and in the future of USDA.

USDA has a good track record for hiring persons with disabilities, but there is still room for improvement, and as the federal workforce continues to retire, we will have significant opportunities to hire qualified candidates with disabilities. In keeping with the Secretary's policy, I am committed to helping USDA create a more diverse and inclusive work environment, one that is open and supportive of all. Our goal is to provide full access for persons with disabilities in jobs, programs, services, and facilities. We should accept nothing less.